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ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL QUESTIONS: REPORTS OF SUBSIDIARY BODIES, CONFERENCES AND RELATED QUESTIONS

Methods of work of the Committee for Development Planning

Report of the Secretary-General

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INTRODUCTION

1. At its organizational session for 1995 (7-10 February 1995), the Economic and Social Council decided, inter alia, "to request the Secretary-General to submit a comprehensive report to the Council at its substantive session in 1995 to enable it to review the working methods of the Committee, in line with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 48/162 of 20 December 1993". The present report, prepared in response to the request, attempts to take into account the restructuring of the Economic and Social Council as well as reflections on the work of the Committee made in the course of its own self-evaluations in 1987 1/ and 1990. 2/

I. THE COMMITTEE AND ITS TERMS OF REFERENCE

2. The Committee for Development Planning (CDP) was established by the Council to provide independent expert advice on development trends and projections, including planning techniques and development strategies, and on the activities of the United Nations and its specialized agencies in those fields, in order to propose measures for their improvement. In resolution 1079 (XXXIX) of 28 July 1965, the Council also invited the Committee "to make any suggestions it may consider useful concerning the scope of its terms of reference".

3. At its first and second sessions, the Committee elaborated on its terms of reference, emphasizing the need to devote attention to the design and implementation of effective policies. In its initial years, the Committee gave considerable attention to planning problems, especially those related to plan implementation at the national and regional levels. In that context, the Committee has dealt with a broad range of policy issues.

4. The focus of the Committee's work has evolved in accordance with developments in the world economy and the evolution in the modalities of international economic cooperation. Accordingly, in the 1970s, the Committee devoted considerable time to the formulation of international development strategies and their review and appraisal. Its mandate was also enlarged by specific requests from the Council, largely in connection with the identification of the least developed among the developing countries. Its existing terms of reference impose few constraints on its freedom of action to formulate its work programme as it sees fit.

5. Committee members are appointed by the Council on nomination by the Secretary-General. Nominees are selected with a view to ensuring a high level of practical and academic experience in development policy design and implementation and adequate geographical and gender balance. Some have been based in academic institutions; others have been senior governmental officials, including current or former ministers of development, directors of central banks, heads of research institutes etc. In the past, most Committee members have been economists, but a few have been from other disciplines such as sociology, political science and law. At the same time, care has been taken to ensure that the Committee's collective expertise includes a wide range of specialized interests - e.g., human resources development, environmental

economics, macroeconomics, international trade and finance, and legal frameworks.

II. THEMATIC CONTENT OF THE COMMITTEE'S REPORTS AND ITS RELEVANCE TO INTERGOVERNMENTAL BODIES

6. The thematic content of the reports of the Committee has varied considerably over the years, due to changes in the relative importance of various issues on the agenda of the Council and the General Assembly, changes in the composition of the Committee and interests of Committee members themselves, and the wide latitude for choice of theme implied by the Committee's terms of reference. Annex I provides an illustrative (but not exhaustive) list of topics on formulating and implementing development strategies at the national and international levels. An attempt has been made to identify the contributions made in the reports of the Committee to the various topics and to indicate whether the Committee devoted a major or minor portion of its report to the issue in question. Annex II contains a list of the topics that have been the subject of particularly lengthy treatment in the reports of the Committee.

7. The focus of the Committee's work has evolved in accordance with developments in the world economy and the evolution in the modalities of international economic cooperation. Thus, the coverage of issues from a national or regional perspective was fairly prominent during the first 10 years of the Committee's work. In the 1970s, however, the Committee focused increasingly on the formulation of international development strategies and their review and appraisal. It also addressed itself to a number of specific requests from the Council, largely in connection with the identification of the least developed among the developing countries. Beginning with the report on the twenty-fourth session, the coverage of issues from a national or regional perspective once again gained some prominence. However, it might be noted that coverage of such issues has been unsystematic and far from comprehensive. The regular inclusion in the reports of the Committee of a section on prospects for the world economy and their policy implication began only with the report on the twentieth session, in 1994.

8. The work of the Committee on the formulation of the international development strategies is thought to have been very helpful to the Council and the General Assembly, as has been its work on the identification of the least developed among the developing countries. While the reports of the Committee are of uniformly high quality, a few of them - particularly those on its eighth, tenth, twelfth and twenty-fourth sessions, dealing, respectively, with mass poverty and unemployment, industrialization, depressed regions of the world, and human resources development - were particularly useful for the deliberations of intergovernmental bodies. The first two reports mentioned above contributed to the intergovernmental processes of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), respectively, as well as those of the Council. The third report mentioned above concerned the review and appraisal of the International Development Strategy for the Second United Nations Development Decade (1970s), which was a principal focus of the Council. The fourth report led directly to the major emphasis on human resources development in the International Development Strategy for the

Fourth United Nations Decade (1990s) and was associated with a shift in emphasis by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

9. The Committee has been instrumental in developing or popularizing a number of key conceptual elements in the area of development planning and policies. These include, inter alia, a comprehensive approach to development, which has evolved over time to include social, economic and environmental factors; the category of least developed countries; the close relationship between plans and effective policies for their implementation; and the usefulness of global projections as a background for international economic cooperation.

III. ROLE OF THE COMMITTEE WITHIN THE SYSTEM OF THE UNITED NATIONS AND ITS SPECIALIZED AGENCIES

10. The status of CDP provides it with a unique opportunity to direct its views and recommendations on critical development issues to the international community. However, the effectiveness of the Committee could be much greater if its relationship with the intergovernmental machinery of the Council and the General Assembly were enhanced. The Committee could also become one of the main instruments of the Secretary-General who could turn to the Committee for its advice. Similarly, the bureaux of the Council, its functional Commissions and the Second and Third Committees of the General Assembly could identify forthcoming issues where it is felt that expert advice provided by the Committee would be of particular import. Functioning on the model of national councils of economic or development advisers, the Committee would then be able to draft its views and recommendations in a manner responsive to the priority concerns of the Organization. In order to make timely contributions to the deliberations of the functional Commissions of the Council, working groups established by CDP could submit their reports directly to the body concerned, on the authority of the experts involved. At its plenary session, the full Committee would, of course, consider the working group report, amend it, as necessary, and adopt it, as has been the practice in the past.

11. If the thrust of this recommendation is to be pursued, however, it is of the utmost importance not to jeopardize the independent status of the members of the Committee. More effective use of CDP could reduce - but not eliminate - the need to convene ad hoc expert groups to advise the Secretary-General on specific issues.

12. The Committee has often felt that, to introduce its report, it would be helpful if the Chairperson of the Committee could address the Council at its substantive session, and can thus be expected to welcome the recent Council decision which provides for this procedure, beginning in 1996. When its work is relevant to other intergovernmental bodies, a similar practice might be followed. Informal exchanges between members of the Committee and the delegates to the Council or other bodies could enhance the effectiveness of this practice.

13. In this context, a number of possibilities may be envisaged. If the Council considers it useful for the Committee to continue to prepare an annual appraisal of the policy implications of recent developments and projected trends in the world economy, participation by the Chairperson of the Committee in the high-

level segment during its policy dialogues could be considered. This actually occurred by special arrangement in 1992 on an experimental basis. Should the Committee have addressed an issue relevant to the deliberations of the Council in its coordination segment or in its operational activities segment, the Chairperson of the Committee or a member designated by him/her might be invited to address the Council when the issue in question is to be addressed. Finally, the Chairperson might be invited to introduce the Committee report during the general segment.

IV. QUALITY OF PRODUCT

14. The themes to be addressed by the Committee, their analyses and policy recommendations should be such as to serve as a catalyst to thinking in those areas by all concerned with development problems. Such themes could relate to emerging issues and neglected areas of importance to development.

15. For the Committee to do a thorough job, studies on selected themes need to be prepared, by either outside experts or the Secretariat, for consideration by either working groups of the Committee or the Committee itself. The deliberations of the Committee and its working groups on selected themes would be enhanced through contacts with relevant research institutions, either within the United Nations system or outside of it.

16. CDP should not, however, compete with or duplicate the activities of the various international agencies, including the United Nations itself, especially where in-depth research is required. The limited time during which CDP and its working groups meet means that they should, generally speaking, concentrate on problems and issues for the elucidation of which the accumulated knowledge and experience of members is the crucial input.

V. DISSEMINATION

17. The effectiveness of the Committee's work could be enhanced by greater outreach. Selective efforts might be made to improve the dissemination of its reports and additional resources be sought to accomplish this. Possibilities might include systematic contacts with journalists who specialize in economics and selected non-governmental organizations, use of the information centres of the Department of Public Information, and a cycle of media interviews on development issues related to the Committee's ongoing work. It might also wish to consider requesting the Secretariat to issue the reports of its working groups under departmental "occasional papers" series so as to reach possibly a wider audience by targeting particular groups according to the subject-matter of the reports. The Department for Development Support and Management Services, through its regional and interregional advisers, and the United Nations Development Programme, through its resident representatives, could also help to draw the attention of decision makers at the national level to the work of the Committee.

VI. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. Selection of themes

18. Without jeopardizing the independent nature of the Committee, consideration needs to be given to ways of ensuring that the themes chosen by the Committee are pertinent to the deliberations of the Council and/or its functional commissions. This task would be facilitated if the Council would encourage multi-year work programmes in each of its functional commissions and agree on the themes of each of its own segments at least one year in advance.

B. Plenary sessions and working groups

19. CDP meets in plenary session annually, for one week, usually in New York in mid April. The session is preceded by annual meetings of the three working groups, usually in New York or Geneva in the fall or winter. Each working group consists of from five to eight experts, comprising both CDP members and co-opted experts, who meet for from three to five days to explore specific topics. CDP has implemented various changes in its meeting schedule: shorter plenary sessions; reduced processing of documents, particularly in-session documents; and more informal servicing of working groups, usually without simultaneous interpretation. In the view of CDP, many of these changes have increased efficiency and cost-effectiveness. The pattern of meetings permits the effective consideration of CDP reports by the Council, at its annual substantive session, in the general discussion on international economic and social policy.

Notes

1/ E/1987/23, paras. 77-83.

2/ E/1990/27, paras. 146-158.

Annex I

THEMATIC CONTENT OF CDP REPORTS

	Session for which report was prepared	
	Major treatment	Minor treatment
1. Development strategies from national/regional perspective		
1.1 Economic planning		
1.1.1 General observations	2	23
1.1.2 Regional practices and problems	2, 3, 5, 7	
1.2 Sector-specific development strategies and policies		
1.2.1 Industry	7, 10	11, 13, 15, 16
1.2.2 Agriculture and food	2, 5	11, 13, 15, 16
1.2.3 Energy		11, 15, 16
1.2.4 Environment	25	15
1.2.5 Physical infrastructure		12
1.3 Human resources and social aspects		
1.3.1 Health and education (human resource development)	24	15, 16, 23
1.3.2 Poverty and income distribution	8, 12, 24	7, 25
1.3.3 Women		13, 24
1.3.4 Population		13, 16

	Session for which report was prepared	
	Major treatment	Minor treatment
1.4 Domestic resource mobilization		
1.4.1 Fiscal policy	5, 26	23
1.4.2 Domestic capital markets		
1.4.3 Entrepreneurship markets		23
1.4.4 Inflation		
1.5 National policies vis-à-vis international system of trade and finance		
1.5.1 International trade	25, 26	23
1.5.2 Foreign direct investment		27
1.5.3 National debt management		27
1.5.4 Technology transfer		15, 16
1.5.5 Economic reform in developing countries	28	
1.6 Economic cooperation among developing countries	14, 17	3, 5, 19
2. International economic cooperation for development	19, 20, 21, 28	
2.1 Role of the United Nations in the framework of international economic cooperation		28
2.2 International development strategy		
2.2.1 Formulation	4, 6, 16, 25	2, 3, 14, 15
2.2.2 Review and appraisal	9, 12, 13	7, 8
2.2.3 Projection methodology of United Nations agencies		14, 24

		Session for which report was prepared	
		Major treatment	Minor treatment
2.3	International trading system	21	23
2.3.1	Multilateral trading system (GATT)	25	11
2.3.2	Protectionism	26	11
2.3.3	Commodities		
2.4	International monetary and financial system	21	
2.4.1	Balance of payments and adjustments (IMF)	16, 18	
2.4.2	International liquidity	12	
2.4.3	Global demand management	10, 17, 18, 19, 22, 25	20, 23
2.5	Finance and development		
2.5.1	Official flows	22, 27	11, 12, 16, 18, 20, 21
2.5.2	Disarmament and development finance		16, 19
2.5.3	International capital markets and external debt problems	20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 27	12, 19
2.6	Special measures for specific country groups		
2.6.1	Least developed (including criteria)	7, 20, 27	15
2.6.2	Sub-Saharan Africa	20, 21	12
2.7	Technical cooperation for development	28	
3.	Implications of emerging trends for development prospects of developing countries		

		Session for which report was prepared	
		Major treatment	Minor treatment
3.1	World economic outlook on unchanged policies	10, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29	
3.2	Economic and political reform in socialist countries	27	
3.3	Economic integration among developed market economies	26	
3.4	Global environmental and natural resource issues		25
4.	Linkages among sectors/issues		
4.1	Agriculture, industry, population	13	
4.2	Agriculture, industry, commodity trade resource transfers		11
4.3	Environment, development, poverty	28	
4.4	Relation of population growth and migration to natural resources, environment and development	28	

Annex II

ISSUES TREATED IN DEPTH IN CDP REPORTS

	Session
Planning and plan implementation in Latin America	Second
Planning and plan implementation in Africa	Third
Planning and plan implementation in ECAFE region	Fifth
Characteristics and identification of the least developed countries	Seventh
Long-term planning: European experience	Seventh
Mass poverty and unemployment	Eighth
Industrialization of developing countries	Tenth
Depressed regions of the world	Twelfth
Transfer of resources to developing countries	Eleventh
Economic cooperation among developing countries	Fourteenth
Economic cooperation among developing countries	Seventeenth
World economic recovery and international monetary and financial cooperation	Eighteenth
International economic cooperation	Nineteenth
Breaking the barriers to development	Twentieth
The challenge to multilateralism	Twenty-first
Doubling development finance	Twenty-second
Human resource development	Twenty-fourth
External debt, development finance and global macroeconomic management	Twenty-fifth
Water: the fundamental resource	Twenty-fifth
Emerging trading blocs	Twenty-sixth
National fiscal policies	Twenty-sixth

	Session
Reforms in Eastern Europe and the USSR: their impact on developing countries	Twenty-seventh
Criteria for identifying the least developed countries	Twenty-seventh
Environment, development and poverty	Twenty-eighth
Economic reform in developing countries	Twenty-eighth
Population growth and migration in relation to natural resources environment and development	Twenty-ninth
Technical cooperation for sustainable development	Twenty-ninth

Annex III

SYMBOLS OF REPORTS AND DATES OF THE REGULAR SESSIONS OF THE COMMITTEE

Session	Symbol of report	Date of session
First	E/4207/Rev.1	2-11 May 1966
Second	E/4306	10-20 April 1967
Third	E/4515	29 April-10 May 1968
Fourth and fifth	E/4682	17-21 March 1969
Sixth	E/4776	5-15 January 1970
Seventh	E/4990	22 March-1 April 1971
Eighth	E/5126	10-20 April 1972
Ninth	E/5293	2-12 April 1973
Tenth	E/5478	25 March-3 April 1974
Eleventh	E/5671	7-16 April 1975
Twelfth	E/5793	29 March-7 April 1976
Thirteenth	E/5939	11-21 April 1977
Fourteenth	E/1978/46	6-16 March 1978
Fifteenth	E/1979/37	26 March-5 April 1979
Sixteenth	E/1980/3	7-16 January 1980
Seventeenth	E/1981/27	23 March-1 April 1981
Eighteenth	E/1982/15	19-28 April 1982
Nineteenth	E/1983/16	18-27 April 1983
Twentieth	E/1984/17	17-21 May 1984
Twenty-first and resumed twenty-first	E/1985/29	19-21 November 1984 and 20-23 April 1985
Twenty-second	E/1986/26	19-22 March 1986
Twenty-third	E/1987/23	21-24 April 1987
Twenty-fourth	E/1988/16	12-15 April 1988
Twenty-fifth	E/1989/29	9-12 May 1989
Twenty-sixth	E/1990/27	30 April-4 May 1990
Twenty-seventh	E/1991/32	22-26 April 1991
Twenty-eighth	E/1992/27	18-22 April 1992
Twenty-ninth	E/1994/22	12-14 January 1994

Note: The first report issued as a sales publication was that of the sixth session. Subsequently, the reports of the eighth to twenty-eighth sessions (1972-1992) were also issued as sales publications.